

## What do the warnings of Revelation Chapter 22 verses 18 - 19 mean to Christians?

I [The Messiah vs 13, 16] - testify to every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any one shall add to these things, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book.

And if any one take from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.  
(Revelation 22:18,19 JND NT)

### The Question

The question concerns the intent of these verses and in essence asks; does a believer who adds to or takes from the word of God lose his or her salvation? This can be broken down into four sub-questions.

1. Who is this warning applicable to? Is it the Christian believer or some other class of person?
2. What does the warning imply? That is, what does; “If any one shall add to these things” or “if any one take from the words of the book of this prophecy” mean?
3. Does the consequence described in these verses mean that the person loses his or her salvation?
4. The practical application: what does this warning mean to me, a believer in Jesus Christ, the Messiah?

### Summary

1. This passage pertains primarily to Revelation, but its warnings of adding to or subtracting from the Word can be applied to the whole of Scripture, since the Book referred is part of the Bible.
2. Those that add or take from Scripture are those that deny Christ; thus are unsaved. Therefore the passage does not indicate a believer can lose his or her inheritance (to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you 1 Peter 1:4) i.e. salvation, who by definition has been born again and has been guaranteed by the Holy Spirit unto salvation.
3. There are many example of cults and major religions whose writings are stated to be inspired and more authoritative than the Canon of the Lord God Most High, eg *The Book of Mormon*, and thus add to Scripture. These the Lake of Fire waits. Those that subtract from the Scripture, such as the Jews who do not hold the New Testament as authoritative, are unsaved. The archetypical example is the Pharisees who added and subtracted from the Torah, leading to Jesus’ condemnation of them.
4. The warnings and consequences of these verses do belong to Christendom and thus the apostate church. These are not saved.

5. Adding and subtracting from Scripture demonstrates the unsaved state of the person, thus they will lose out on dwelling in the New Jerusalem - the Lake of Fire will be their final resting place.

## Background - the Believers Assurance of Salvation

Scripture is clear that a true believer is kept secure by the power of God, sealed for the day of redemption ([Ephesians 4:30](#)), and of all those whom the Father has given to the Son, He will lose none of them:

And this is the will of him that has sent me, that of all that he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up in the last day. (John 6:39).

Something Christians miss - it is not our doing that 'keeps us', but the power of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is God's work, not ours ([Titus 3:5](#)), and it is His power that keeps us. Indeed the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the hope we have: "who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." ([2 Corinthians 1:22](#), [2 Corinthians 5:5](#), [Ephesians 1:14](#), [Ephesians 4:30b](#)). It is clear that Paul was painstaking in ensuring the early church clearly knew and understood their salvation was secure, repeating multiple times that God the Father had given them the Spirit in their hearts as a guarantee. Unlike earthly guarantees we can rest assured that the Holy Spirit will never go back on his word: indeed he is incapable of doing so, for it is his character to be truth.

Jesus repeated the statement of not losing anyone one in his prayer just before he was crucified (John 17:12). Some have suggested the John 17 statement is a contradiction of the promise in John 6 because he had lost one, Judas. However, in careful reading one finds this is not the case - Jesus had not lost one of his own, but the "son of perdition". A believer is born again, becoming a son of God; Judas was a son of Satan and was never a believer, but an imposter; Judas was a traitor, and by his transgression (Act 1:25) blasphemed the Holy Spirit and died (Not to say that God had given him a chance to repent, but he *chose* not to). That is, if one rejects Christ, as Judas did - he gave Jesus up to be murdered - one cannot be saved: it is illogical to believe otherwise - for the one who turns away the rescuer cannot be rescued. The Lord Jesus Christ also proclaimed:

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." (John 10:28-29b).

Note that Jesus' promise of John 6:39 has a blessing; believers will all be raised up in the last day (see [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)). That is Christians will be taken to heaven to be with Him.

Although a true believer in Christ cannot be lost, he or she may certainly be out of communion with God, be cast down and disciplined by the Father. In like manner Hymenaeus and Alexander, Christians of the church at Ephesus, were turned over to Satan by Paul so they might be taught a lesson (1 Timothy 1:20). Again these verses are often misinterpreted. Paul clearly outlines the action and purpose, none linked to salvation. The

action relates to their corruption of the gospel (Hymenaeus said the resurrection had already past - 2 Timothy 2:18, and Alexander opposed Paul - see 2 Timothy 4:14, and most likely Acts 19:33, 34). The consequence of perverting the gospel was excommunication and being put out of the congregation, until they had learnt the lesson. Once learnt they would return. The consequence was one of physical discipline, and most likely loneliness, sickness or physical ailment; it was not a loss of salvation. Likewise Paul speaks of being shipwrecked when a believer runs astray which is not losing one's salvation (1 Timothy 1:19), but an act of loving discipline by the Father. The analogy of being shipwrecked is very apt - a shipwrecked sailor is useless - he cannot possibly be working the good works of God ([Ephesians 2:10](#)), but he is still a sailor - this is not taken away from him.

In answering a question such as this, one must be mindful that Scripture is one complete unit, being the Canon of God (literally meaning *measuring stick*) and therefore any answer needs to be consistent with every other part of Scripture. If it looks like the interpretation of passage is in conflict with another, it is always the person at fault not Scripture.

## Answers

***Who is this warning applicable to? Is it the Christian believer or some other class of persons?***

Note that this not the first time such a warning is seen in the Canon of God. The Torah (Law) has a very similar ordinance, forbidding the addition to or subtraction from the law ([Deuteronomy 4:2](#)). The Jews did not obey this law, and in fact they supplanted the law with their own traditions (see Matthew 15:3, Mark 7:8 & John 9 etc.). The Jews had forgotten the most fundamental attribute of Scripture:

[Every word of God is pure \(Proverb 30:5\).](#)

The verses in Revelation 22 sets out for whom the warning is for: 18a states the warning is for "everyone who *hears* [my emphasis] the words of the prophecy of this book". So who might this be? It is for every person, whatever race of religion or economic or social standing, believer or unbeliever. It is for anyone who hears - which has the connotation of hearing and understanding, not simply hearing, in passing.

So what are they to hear? It is the prophecy of 'this Book'. Some argue this warning only pertains to the Book of Revelation, but the words spoken, under instruction of the Holy Spirit, became part of one book - the Holy Canon or Scripture of God - the Bible. So adding to Revelation logically includes adding to the whole Bible, since it forms the last and final book of the Canon.

Note the consistency of the command - one test for interpreting the intent of a Biblical command is to ensure its consistency with all of Scripture, for God is never inconsistent; the only inconsistent element is humans. The words of Revelation 22 mimic those of the Law - adding to God's commands (Deuteronomy) or God's prophecies (Revelation) is sin; it places that person above God either overtly or surreptitiously and both are punishable.

Verse 18 gives a clue for whom the warning is for because the consequence are the plagues of the prophecies. Church believers will not be present during the tribulation, having been raptured out of this world and therefore cannot have the plagues “added to him” - the Christian will be in heaven! Thus the verses points to unbelievers.

Verse 19 also gives a clue for whom the warning is being directed - it is those that could enter the New Jerusalem, because those that take away from the Word will lose his part from the tree of life and the holy city, which is the New Jerusalem. The tree of life will reside in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2) and those saved from the great tribulation shall eat thereof. New Jerusalem is principally for Jews - the remnant that turn to God (Romans 9:27, which quotes OT prophecy), and gentiles saved during tribulation (as a result of the converted Jews evangelizing the world - Revelation 14).

The warning therefore relates to those that hear and understand the prophecy then deliberately pervert and corrupt it: it is applicable to the Last Days, therefore, to the people who are in the tribulation, but has a broader application, to the whole of scripture and therefore to unbelievers.

***What do these warnings imply? That is, what does; “If any one shall add to these things” and “if any one take from the words of the book of this prophecy” mean?***

#### Warning 1

To add to “these things” is not merely writing some words. It concerns the expounding, teaching and actions in relation to the prophecies. The example of the Pharisees is the best example of what this means. These Jews took the pure law of God, corrupted, perverted and enforced it, even to death (including Jesus), for their own gain, by adding unwritten traditions and believing their words to be more superior than the law. In doing so they contravened the law itself:

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.(Deuteronomy 4:2).

The corruption of the Law by the Pharisees have been mimicked by many churches, cults and religions, the most notable the Catholic church, that places men’s traditions above the Word of God, thus adding to the words, in its true and fullest sense.

So what are “these things”? To my mind the warning concerns adding to the prophecies of the Book of Revelation, because the punishment referred to concerns the plagues that are written in *this book* [my emphasis] - that is the Book of Revelation, which outlines the principal plagues that shall befall all people, except believers (who have been raptured to heaven), in the Last Days. Those that downplay, falsify or add to these prophecies shall suffer the same fate as the prophecies foretell, that of being cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20, 20:20, 20:14,15).

#### Warning 2

To take from the words of the book is more than rubbing out some words. It concerns the denial of the prophecies contained in Revelation, and hence the denial of the authority of

*this* book and the Bible as a whole. Denying the authority of the Book, denies God, because He is the author - and denying God has only one consequence - death ([2 Timothy 2:12](#)). This interpretation is consistent with the rest of Scripture. Denying God is punished by death, which ends after the second resurrection where the sinner is cast into the Lake of Fire. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is the highest form of denying God ([Mark 3:29](#)). Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is to say that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God: and logically if one denies the Saviour, one cannot be saved.

### Examples

Scripture provides examples of men who have added to or taken away from the Word of God. As already indicated above, the Pharisees are the archetypical example and to whom Jesus gave the strongest condemnation, because they should have understood:

Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered. (Luke 11:52)

Note that the warning in Revelation is essentially to those that hear, that is, those that understand or should understand the words - in exactly the same way the Pharisees should have known.

The Apostle Peter warns against the very men Jesus is warning in Revelation:

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” (2 Peter 2:1)

Destructive heresies are those that prevent people being saved; for if the teacher preaches heresy how shall one be saved:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14)

The gospel is of no effect if that one who preaches does not preach the truth!

The Apostle Jude uses even stronger language:

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:4)

Another example are the Jews, whom Paul points out are distant from God. They have rejected the New Testament as the Word of God, therefore suffer, and will suffer in the Tribulation with only remnant being saved ([Romans 9:27](#)).

***Does the consequence described in these verses mean that the person loses his or her salvation?***

The consequence for adding to the words of the prophecy is suffering the plagues described in Revelation, thus that person goes through the Tribulation. The consequence of

taking from the words of prophecy is denied access to the tree of life, thus is cast into the lake of fire. The tree of life is spoken of in Genesis (2 and 3), Proverb 3:18 and Revelation. The right to the tree of life is given to those that obey the commands of God and by doing so may enter into the New Jerusalem. Only saved people can do this:

*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14*

Its purpose is to heal (be a therapeutic in Greek) the nations (gentiles) during the millennial reign: there will be no disease or illness.

*In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2*

Those that are unsaved cannot enter the new city - their taking and adding to the prophecy will be evidence of their unsaved state.

**Thus persons committing these acts are unsaved.** Therefore, consequences described are for those that are unsaved, having been judged and condemned, forfeiting their salvation because they have reject the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not pertain to a believer who cannot lose his or her salvation.

***And the practical application: what does this warning mean to me, a believer in Jesus Christ, the Messiah?***

As explained above, I do not believe these verses pertain to Christians, although it is a clear warning to them: the actual consequences occur in the Tribulation - Christians are saved, and therefore do not pass through the Tribulation.

The warning pertains to the prophecy in Revelation. However, Revelation is the last and final book - no other inspired word was written after the Apostles died and since Revelation forms part of the Canon, the warning belongs to the whole Bible. Therefore, the warning belongs to all people, not those that pass through the tribulation, and therefore, is a warning to Christians as well.

**The warning to Christians is this: evidence of the unsaved state of a person, whatever he or she says, is that he or she will add or take from Scripture, nullifying the prophecies of God. Such a person cannot be saved, for they will deny the saving grace of God, and thus will be punished by the Lake of Fire.**